

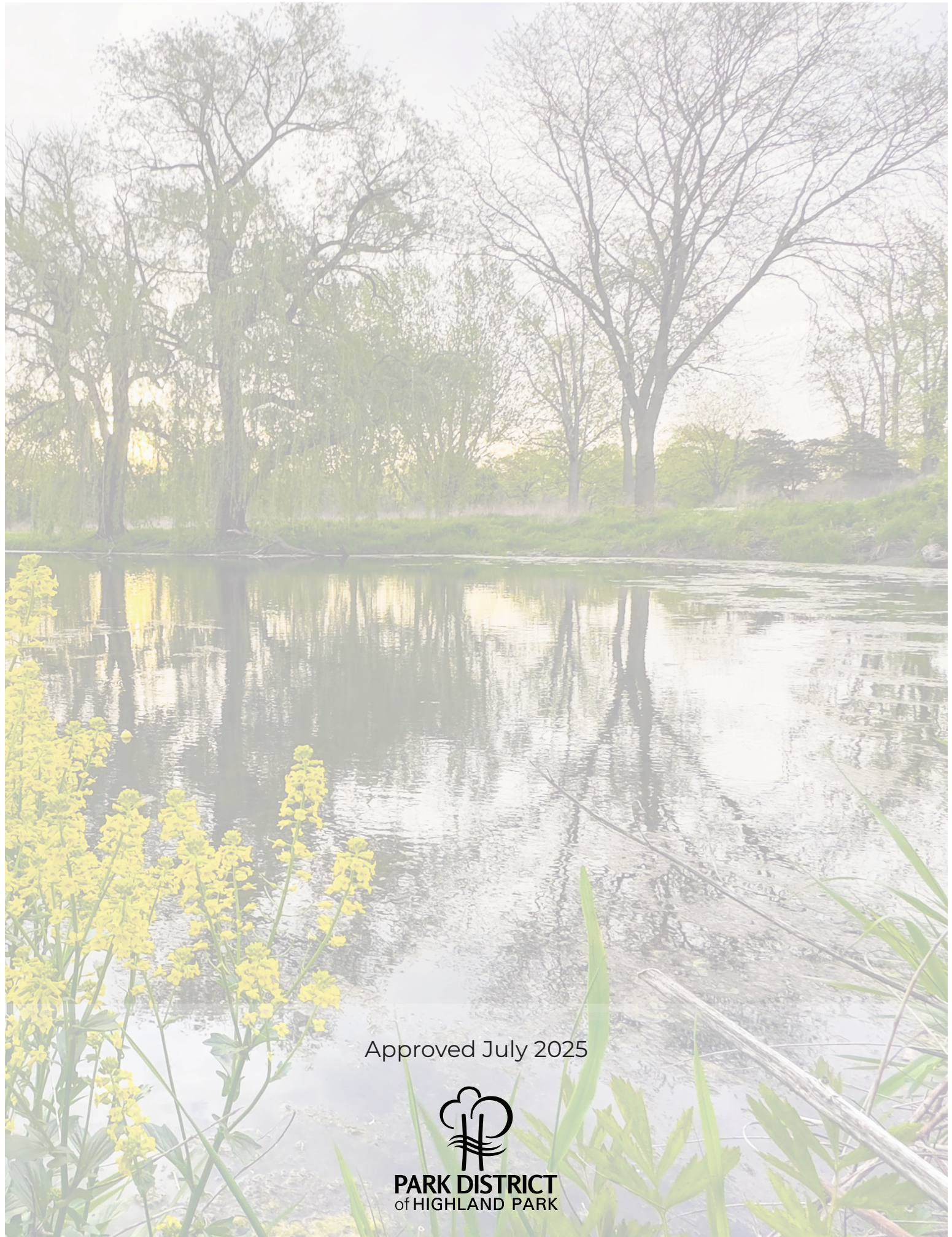
GREENPATH

PARK DISTRICT *of* HIGHLAND PARK

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• *Sustainable Path Forward* •
• 2025 •





Approved July 2025



PARK DISTRICT
of HIGHLAND PARK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GreenPath is intended to guide the Park District of Highland Park to operational sustainability by working to mitigate, prepare for, and build resiliency to climate change. This plan is focused on areas that make significant impact and guided by measurable goals. GreenPath's development included staff across all departments and was informed by background research, an understanding of regional climate change threats and priorities, as well as the consideration of the District's accomplishments and lessons learned through implementing the 2018 Sustainability Plan.

Context - History

Founded in 1909, the Park District of Highland Park has long been a steward of the environment, and embraces sustainable practices in the District's mission, vision, and values statements, and environmental policy.

In 1992, the Park District of Highland Park was the first Park District in Illinois to adopt an environmental policy, which guided sustainability efforts until 2015. Staff developed the District's first sustainability plan in 2015, which identified sustainability goals and opportunities to coordinate with the City of Highland Park's sustainability efforts. To complement GreenPrint 2024, the District's Strategic Plan, and the City of Highland Park's 2017 Sustainability Plan, the District's Sustainability Plan was updated in 2018.

The City of Highland Park shares this value and commitment to sustainability and has been a leader in sustainability planning. The City of Highland Park has been a member of the Greenest Region Compact since 2016 and joined the Global Compact of Mayors for Climate & Energy in 2019. The City of Highland Park released their first Sustainability Plan in 2010, which was crafted with the support of the Green Alliance – of which the Park District is a member. Since 2010, the City has updated their sustainability plan three times, in 2017, 2020, and 2023.

Context – Sustainability & Climate Change

Sustainability is most commonly defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs¹. Generally, sustainability is the practice of conserving resources for future use and often considers the environmental, economic, and social sectors. In the context of climate change, this practice has become increasingly important.

Climate change is a long-term (30+ years) change in the average weather patterns that define local, regional, and global climates. While a natural process, human activities – such as the burning of fossil fuels and changes in land use – have intensified the rapid climate changes observed over the last century. Climate change impacts are experienced across the environmental, economic, and social sectors.

The Northeastern Illinois region is generally experiencing a warmer and wetter climate, with an increased frequency and intensity of extreme heat and heavy precipitation events. Projections indicate that these trends are expected to continue. The Park District understands these impacts will change the landscape of our parks, lakefront, programs, events, and daily operations.

¹ United Nations (n.d.). *Sustainability*. United Nations. - <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning Process

1. Foundational Research:

- Understand climate change threats facing our region.
- Identify regional priorities.
- How other Illinois Park Districts are tackling environmental sustainability.

2. Priority Analysis:

- Evaluate regional needs with Park District operations to understand how the Park District's efforts can maximize impact.
- Evaluate the success of the 2018 sustainability goals.
- Determine staff priorities for the new plan.

3. Plan Development: The outcome of the staff meetings was clear - the new plan needs goals that are focused, actionable, and measurable. Updated goals, objectives and strategies were crafted and shared with staff and assigned performance measures.

4. Engagement:

- Stakeholder Meetings: A draft of the plan goals and objectives were shared with stakeholders including the Park District Board of Commissioners, the City of Highland Park's Sustainability Advisory Group, and the Go Green Highland Park community organization.
- Community Survey: A community wide survey was launched in January 2025 for a three-week period to better understand the community's input on the Park District's role in community sustainability efforts.

5. Plan Finalization and Base Line Data: Feedback from community and stakeholder engagement helped to further refine the draft plan materials. In preparation to implement the plan, the team is finalizing baseline data to use as a control to evaluate performance.

Implementation of the plan will be led by the planning and projects team over the span of the next 10-years (through 2035). The process will be holistic and require coordination across all departments. The Performance measures will inform progress, and each of the strategies have targets in place to help keep the District on track.

Plan Organization

Three guiding principles frame the plan - which align the sustainability plan's intent with the District's Mission, Vision, and Values.

GreenPath is broken up into five realistic, focused, and measurable goals. Each goal has a performance measure to track progress and two-three objectives. Each objective is further broken down into strategies, a compilation of staff-vetted action items that work towards achieving the larger goal.

Together, the guiding principles, goals, and objectives set the plan's focus. Strategies are actions to guide the plan's implementation with targets to keep track of progress. Strategies are intended to evolve through the plan's life and can be added or removed as needed.













The guiding principles, goals, performance measures, and objectives are summarized on the next page.



SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

OVERVIEW

GREENPATH

GOAL	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	OBJECTIVES	CORE PRINCIPLE
Do Our Part to Maintain Clean Healthy Air <i>Reducing & Offsetting GHG emissions</i>	GHG & CCS Tracking	Increase reliance on renewable energy sources for facility needs.	
		Reduce dependence on fossil fuels for fleet vehicles and maintenance equipment.	
		Increase the District's carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) capacity.	
Use Energy Efficiently <i>District Energy Use</i>	Energy Use Tracking	Increase energy efficiency at District facilities and parks, reduce energy wasted.	
		Integrate energy efficiency through operations and design.	
Use Water Efficiently <i>Park Water Use</i>	Water Use Tracking	Increase stormwater capture for District water use.	
		Strategically use water for landscaping and park maintenance.	
Reduce Landfill Waste <i>Reducing & Diverting Waste</i>	Waste Tracking	Implement waste reduction efforts at all parks, facilities, and within each department.	
		Expand recycling opportunities and divert waste from the landfill.	
		Expand composting opportunities across the District.	
Cultivate a Sustainability Identity for the District <i>Park District Workforce & Community Outreach</i>	Annual Survey	Incorporate sustainability into the PDHP workforce and culture.	
		Create and develop a recognizable brand, with a broad presence at parks, facilities, and on the website.	
		Support staff and the community in making sustainable choices.	